**Introduction**

- MSF supports a City of Cape Town operated youth clinic in Khayelitsha, South Africa. It provides HIV-infected youth aged 12 to 25 years with pre-ART and ART support, clinical care and treatment through youth clubs that meet monthly.
- In May 2012, a private “virtual support group” (instant messaging chat-room) intervention was introduced making use of Mxit, a social-networking platform for mobile phones, with the aim of providing continued social engagement among youth between club meetings.
- A lay counsellor facilitated discussions in the chat-room for one hour every week-day afternoon.
- Club members were provided with an airtime voucher worth $0.50 (US) to register with Mxit.

**Methods**

- In 2013 a mixed-methods evaluation was conducted on the acceptability and use of the chat-room, including:
- Focus group discussions (FGDs): Two FGDs were held with 11 youth club members, including some on ART, and some ineligible for ART.
- Questionnaires: Youth club members were asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire. 60/90 (66.7%) completed the questionnaire.

**Results**

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Mxit use</th>
<th>Top 3 other social media used</th>
<th>Top 3 reasons for using the chat-room</th>
<th>Top 3 barriers to use of the chat-room</th>
<th>Use of chat-room</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age range</td>
<td>14-25</td>
<td>Ever used Mxit 60%</td>
<td>To get advice 57%</td>
<td>Changed mobile phone or SIM card 22%</td>
<td>Ever visited the chatroom 33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>Used Mxit other than for support group 38%</td>
<td>To connect with others 18%</td>
<td>Misplaced chatroom password 15%</td>
<td>Visited chatroom in the past month 20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Owned a mobile phone 83%</td>
<td>Used Mxit for private conversations with other club members 29%</td>
<td>To hear what others have to say 10%</td>
<td>Couldn’t afford airtime 12%</td>
<td>Visited when counsellor not online 17%</td>
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**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

"Okay, at the time when she joined the Mxit, ... she had very little information about HIV and AIDs and in there ... she got a lot of information."

"I do want something like this...Cause when I found out I was positive, I did not go to anyone."

**THEMES:**

1. Support outside the youth club meetings: Almost all participants felt that offering the chat-room service in addition to club meetings was important and said that would like to see it continue.
2. Reasons for not using Mxit included a lack of interest in social media, preference for other chat-rooms and social media platforms, loss of password or phone, loss of interest, and considering Mxit as being for younger people.
3. Suggestions for improvement included changing the timing of when counsellors were present, having predetermined topics for discussion, having youth-friendly topics, and provision of information.
4. A few participants mentioned cost of using the service, but overall cost was not a concern.
5. Participants generally preferred chatting in a closed group of known or linked friends and wished to remain anonymous in chats with strangers.

**Conclusions**

- Despite low use of the chat-room, participants indicated a desire for it to continue.
- Barriers to use included logistic short-comings, ongoing changes in choice of social media platforms, and a lack of critical mass for interactive discussions.
- The findings of the study are being used to inform a second phase pilot intervention that will use a multi-platform approach and will provide opportunities for more interactive discussions.